

THURSDAY AFTERNOON SERIES

FACULTY OF MUSIC UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO 2:10 PM
WALTER HALL

University of Toronto

JAZZ ENSEMBLE

directed by Ronald Chandler and Phil Nimmons

February 3, 1977

PROGRAM

Don't Git Sassy

Thad Jones

Tall Cotton (John McPherson, Trombone)

Sammy Nestico

Atlantic Suite

Phil Nimmons

Harbours

Islands (Don Lee, clarinet)

Tides

Horizons

Personnel:

Saxes: Phil Alperson, Len McCarthy, Don Lee, Steve Hutt, Kim Sturgess

Trumpets: Mary Ann Lucas, Brice Walker, Graham Young, Neal Farquharson

Trombones: John McPherson, Miroslav Letko, Colleen Darraugh, Peter Jacobs,
David Boyd

Rhythm: Michael Coghlan, John Torcello, David Callingham, Steve King,
Michael Perry, Kevin Little

Next Thursday Afternoon Series: February 10, 1977, 2:10 p.m. Walter Hall,
Student Chamber Music Concert.

The Atlantic Suite

When man first began mumbling and mouthing his way toward his chosen stars he kept in touch with himself, with his past, and with the world that gave him birth by telling stories. In the beginning these were composed entirely of sound (for words were still clumsy, ineffective things) and today some of the best of the story tellers still work with sound...these are the true music makers, and Phil Nimmons is such a one.

Take the first movement - HARBOURS. Harbours are the beginning and the end of man's encroachment on the sea; they are also the mating place for seamen and for landmen, and in this movement one of the greatest of the world's harbours, Halifax and Bedford Basin, comes alive in all its intricate melding of ageless mysteries and modern mechanical miracles, old voices and new. There is the inexorable slow swirling mutter of black waters against million-year reefs; the harshly dominant thrust of propellers driving a huge ore carrier; the ominous rumble out of time of the mighty explosion that once turned this harbour into a holocaust; the muted vibration of a distant foghorn and the calm responses of a bell-buoy hidden under heaving mist, tolling a way for men and ships. It is all here in this music; the harshly angled cranes at night, lit by flaring lights, dimmed by slanting rain... sounds of sky and wind and sea...and man. Deep inside this intricate pattern we also hear the unique sound brought by the black people who came to Halifax long ago; the lilt and rhythm of a different world now blended into this one.

In the second movement, ISLANDS, the mood changes, and the story is a different tale. Perhaps Nimmons should have called it THE Island, for he wrote it under the spell of Prince Edward Island, which is THE Island to those who live upon it. Here is a musical story of the strange marriage between land and water, and their children--the beaches the sea gives...and takes away; the ceaseless, but infinitely slow change in shapes, textures, sounds during the infinitely complex and erotic dance between the wave's edge and the land's edge...liquid whispers at night in a long summer calm; thunder at dawn in the morning of a winter storm. It is all here but there is more, for here too is the story how each of us longs to be an island, an island filled with his own special people, and protected from the threats of alien worlds by the certainties of Ocean.

The third movement; TIDES, is a story of power beyond our understanding...the immeasurably majestic breathing of the sea; the long slow swelling and the long slow exhalation as the waters rise and fall under the moon. The music speaks of the multitudes of life-forms who live in the landwash between land and water, part of both, but owned by neither. It speaks too of the slow emergence of life from the waters onto the land, over empty sand, out of black, striking tidal bogs.

The final movement, HORIZONS, returns us to the people of the sea, those men and women who have turned back toward the ancient aquatic mother of us all. In Nimmons' story, they are Newfoundlanders, and he tells us of their Rock Within the Sea, granite-girt against the whole wide plunge and thrust of the North Atlantic. He tells us what it is that brings a strange transparent look of distance to the eyes of those who dwell by, and for the sea... horizons. Horizons that are limitless, that merge into the sea which is in itself boundless. There are many echoes in this movement of human voices, sometimes raised in song, always tinged with a kind of manic power known only to those who have learned to live with the ancient mother. There is even an echo from a time before our time, when The Rock belonged to the Beothuk Indians, a gentle people whom we massacred to the last child.

This movement, more than all the others, tells us that attainment is not a sufficient motive for existing. The voice of the sea herself comes through to remind us that she is timeless, and that we must make our peace with that, and learn to live with the timeless verities... if we are to survive.

It is a simple story, but a great one. Nimmons tells it beautifully and I, for one, am grateful that he has given us the chance to listen to it.

Farley Mowat
Port Hope, Ontario
1975